

**CEPPS/IRI Quarterly Report: April 1 to June 30, 2005**  
**Asia Regional: Alliance for Reform and Democracy in Asia**  
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## **I. SUMMARY**

The Alliance for Reform and Democracy in Asia (ARDA) focused considerable effort this quarter preparing for the World Forum on Democracy in Asia (WFDA). The forum is slated to be held September 15 to 17 and will be the culmination of much of ARDA's work up until this point. The final strategy workshop on leading up to the WFDA, "Assisting the Consolidation of Asian Democracies," gave democracy activists an opportunity to plan for the WFDA and strategize means of addressing issues faced by Asian democracy. ARDA expects WFDA to be a groundbreaking forum in which the Asia Democracy Index (ADI), a comprehensive ranking of Asian nations and territories, is made public for the first time. WFDA will also be a unique opportunity for Asian groups to seriously discuss the issues that affect Asia and how regional members are best suited to address such issues.

While working on conferences and workshops, ARDA continued to develop its existing programs and update its website, [www.asiademocracy.org](http://www.asiademocracy.org), on a daily basis with relevant regional information and ARDA activities. ARDA is currently working on two major projects to raise awareness of the democracy struggle in Asia: the Asia Democracy Leaders' book and the WFDA video. Additionally, ARDA released the Singapore election report highlighting key issues and findings for the January 2005 elections. As always, ARDA is pleased that support for the Adopt-A-Burmese project remains strong. Additionally, ARDA remains prepared to conduct Rapid Response Missions as the need arises.

## **II. BACKGROUND**

In October 2000, a group of Asian democrats from more than 10 countries gathered in Bangkok, Thailand to form ARDA, a regional advocacy and information-sharing network. The purpose of ARDA is to provide a forum for reformers across Asia to communicate, cooperate, and support the advancement of democracy in the region. One of the founding principles of ARDA was to challenge the obstacles of "noninterference" and "Asian values" to say that democracy, clean government and human rights must be Asian values.

At the Bangkok meeting, participants approved a Resolution of Formation that established goals for the group and the membership of ARDA's interim steering committee. Following the October meeting, IRI established an ARDA website, [www.asiademocracy.org](http://www.asiademocracy.org), giving basic information on the group and posting ARDA's founding documents and actions. The website

has been periodically updated to include new ARDA activities and statements.

ARDA has also conducted Rapid Response Missions (RRMs). The first took place in June 2001 when a two-member team deployed to Malaysia for the purpose of investigating the circumstances of the detention of “reformasi” activists under Malaysia’s Internal Security Act (ISA). The team consisted of ARDA Vice Chair Dr. S. Oyun and Cambodian Member of Parliament (MP) Tioulong Saumura. The mission attracted significant local and international coverage of ARDA’s support for Malaysian democrats. A second mission took place in October 2001, following the announcement of snap elections in Singapore. Australian elections expert David Muffet traveled to Singapore to conduct an assessment of the Singaporean election system. After meeting with Singaporean politicians, journalists and community activists, Dr. Muffet made recommendations for reforms that level the playing field for opposition parties and give Singaporeans a meaningful choice in electing government officials. ARDA’s third RRM occurred in August 2004 when an ARDA team traveled to Hanoi, Vietnam to meet with family members of political prisoners and dissidents. ARDA discovered that communication and intimidation ranked as the most serious issues in Vietnam. In March 2005, following the lifting of parliamentary immunity for three Cambodian opposition leaders, ARDA sent a four member Rapid Response Mission to Cambodia. The objectives of the mission were to seek cooperation from the Cambodian government to respect human rights and democracy in Cambodia, to impress upon the Cambodian government to desist in its persecution of members of the opposition, and to show solidarity with pro-democracy forces and lend support to their efforts to advance democracy in the country. In the course of the two-day mission, the team met with officials and representatives from the Sam Rainsy Party, the Cambodia Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, Cambodian sectoral organizations, Cambodian civil society organizations, human rights organizations and the Undersecretary of State from the Ministry of Interior.

In addition to RRM, ARDA sponsored election observations in Malaysia in March 2004 and in Hong Kong in September 2004. Prior to the observations, ARDA sent assessment teams to the countries to research the political environment, and to meet with NGOs, election commissioners and the press in order to determine the amount of transparency that existed within each system. After each election observation, ARDA staff produced a report and posted it on the ARDA website.

ARDA hosted three conferences to provide opportunities for participants from Asian countries to exchange ideas and experiences, as well as focus on issues such as responsive governance, transparency, and accountability. The most recent conference was held in Indonesia in June 2002 and was co-sponsored by the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD), IRI, NDI and IFES. The conference brought Indonesian political parties and party activists from democratic parties around the region together to share their election experiences, and to discuss how to strengthen internal democracy and build grassroots organizations.

In June 2004, ARDA received IRI funding to set-up the ARDA Secretariat in Singapore. The Secretariat was in operation by October 2004, and has worked with IRI staff to formulate a system of administration for program funds and to improve the overall capacity of ARDA. Shortly before the establishing the Secretariat, ARDA held a Steering Committee meeting in

Taipei where members discussed hiring Secretariat staff, membership requirements, and prepared the ARDA charter.

**Attachment A: Recommendations from “A Report on Election Study Mission to Singapore: January 2005”**

**III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

**A. Singapore Election Report**

Following the previous quarter’s election observation in Singapore, ARDA released “*A Report on Election Study Mission to Singapore: January 2005.*” The publication details, with both text and photos, the experiences of the observation team in Singapore and highlights their findings. The team put together a detailed report of their findings of the elections study mission to Singapore. The report also includes the team’s recommendations to undemocratic election practices in the city-state. The recommendations are included in this quarterly report as “Attachment A.” The report was sent to the relevant organizations and government departments in Singapore. The entire report is available at <http://asiademocracy.org/UserFiles/File/Activity/ESM%20report%20for%20website.pdf>.

**B. WFDA Workshop III: “Assisting the Consolidation of Asian Democracies”**

The last in a series of three strategy workshops for the WFDA was held May 26 and 27 in Bangkok, Thailand. Entitled “Assisting the Consolidation of Asian Democracies,” the workshop facilitated a gathering of activists and politicians from the more established democracies in Asia. The countries that participated in the seminar were Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Timor Leste. The panelists presented the current political situation in their respective countries and the challenges to democracy and strategies formulated.

The lawmakers and civil society leaders spoke about some of the undemocratic election practices have encountered in Asia and the need for national dialogue between political parties leaders. Many felt that the top political leadership of various parties are often antagonistic towards each other, which has adversely impacted the citizenry. A common concern that surfaced was the need for an independent elections commission and the need for such a commission to develop effective and fair elections system for the country.

Free speech was also under threat in a few of the countries. Ms Supinya Klangnarong a media activist, faces a lawsuit brought on by media conglomerate Shin Corp (owned by the family of Thai Prime Minister Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra) for suggesting that the company had profited from Mr. Thaksin being in power. ARDA is particularly concerned about the issues raised by Klangnarong as the case has uncanny similarities to the tactics that the Singapore government wields in suppressing the freedom of expression by opposition politicians, film makers and even internet bloggers. Members of the workshop voiced concern that a pattern could emerge as governments become more sophisticated in using media to control the populous.

The WFDA organizing committee, which comprises of Altsean-Burma, ARDA, Forum-Asia Democracy, the Institute for International Development and TFD, is now gearing up for the conference in Taipei, Taiwan.

### C. WFDA Video

ARDA is in the process of producing a video presentation on the progress and challenges of democracy in Asia. ARDA has been interviewing individuals who have undergone great personal sacrifices to bring democracy to their respective countries. The video will track democracy movements and also the suppression of democracy in Asia. This video crew has been in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand to conduct interviews for the video. So far they have interviewed the following democracy activists:

- Hong Kong – Martin Lee (Legislator), Emily Lau (Legislator), Leung Kwok Hung (Legislator), Cyd Ho (civil society activist)
- Thailand – Surin Pitsuwan (Former Foreign Minister), Abisith Vijjejiva (Leader of Thai Democrat Party)
- Malaysia – Anwar Ibrahim (Former Deputy Prime Minister), Irene Fernandez (leading activist)
- Taiwan – Annette Lu (vice-President), Shih Ming Teh (leading activist, jailed 23 years under the Kuomintang), Peng Ming Ming (leading activist)
- Singapore – JB Jeyaretnam (Opposition leader, currently bankrupted by People's Action Party ministers)

Completion of the video is expected in the next several weeks. Editing of the taped interviews is underway and preparations for final interviews are being made.

### D. Asia Democracy Leaders' Book

ARDA continues to progress on editing manuscripts for the Asia Democracy Leaders' book. The book will compile essays from regional activists on the topic of democracy in Asia. The purpose of the book is to provide the first-person testimony of Asian democrats, spark debate within Asia, and encourage democrats across Asia to push for change.

### E. Asia Democracy Index (ADI) Implementation

The ADI questionnaires were conducted in April and May through ARDA's country partners. The survey forms have been collected and data compiled. A majority of the reports were completed and handed to the ADI Editorial Board in mid-June. The ADI Editorial Board met from 21-24 June to discuss and edit the reports that had been received. Layout, structure and consistency of reports were also studied during this meeting. Other matters that were discussed at the meeting included marketing strategies for the ADI Report, publicity, publication and cover

design. A check on the results of each country's survey and data entry for all the surveys was also conducted by the ARDA Secretariat. ARDA is looking to launching the ADI Report at the WFDA.

#### F. Adopt-A-Burmese

ARDA's on-going campaign for Burma is a simple yet practical one. Pro-democracy organizations and individuals have been contacted to write letters of encouragement personally addressed to the MPs who have been imprisoned by the military junta. These messages of solidarity will certainly inspire and motivate these brave men and women to break the shackles of oppression. Letters of encouragement to these imprisoned MPs have come from individuals and organizations. They include a Swedish MP, a Pilipino Senator , an Australian official , Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats and World Movement for Democracy amongst others. The letters are available at [http://asiademocracy.org/content\\_list.php?section\\_id=9](http://asiademocracy.org/content_list.php?section_id=9). ARDA has also sent the physical copies of these letters to their Burmese contacts who have agreed to have the letters translated and delivered to the MPs and/or their families.

### **IV. RESULTS/ ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

#### **1. Increase communication and cooperation among democratic political leaders throughout the region in order to strengthen efforts to bring about democratic reform in Asia.**

The WFDA workshop once again provided a venue for Asian leaders and activists to meet from throughout the region, and in this case, present papers and discuss issues relating to democratic transitions. The panelists and participants will use the findings and presentations in order to prepare for the next workshop which will eventually lead to the WFDA, where Asian activists can put forth a solid and well thought out plan of action for promoting democracy in Asia.

The ADI, which ARDA is currently working to assemble, provides an excellent opportunity for Asian democrats to cooperate to produce a document that is both accurate and useful as a tool for promoting democratic reform. Furthermore, ARDA hopes that the ADI will spark debate and discussion on the wide range of political systems found within Asia and will allow current democratic leaders to have tangible date with which they can compare and contrast their own experiences.

**2. Facilitate moral and political support for democratic reform through cooperative efforts of Asian democratic leaders.**

The WFDA workshop on “Assisting the Consolidation of Asian Democracies” allowed ARDA to bring democrats from all over Asia and the world to collaborate on and analyze the status of democracy in various countries throughout the region. By consciously bringing together a group so dedicated to the same cause, ARDA facilitated the exchange of ideas and relationship building that is so critical to democratic movements, especially for nascent groups who do not experience much support within their own country.

The Adopt-A-Burmese program also provides a way to support Burmese MPs who have been imprisoned for their political beliefs.

**3. Assist ARDA in becoming an autonomous organization capable of securing its own funds and organizing its own activities in support of democratic reform.**

ARDA continues to work to solidify its position in the Asia region. The Singapore election observation report, as well as each event in which ARDA generates press, raise the legitimacy of ARDA and showcase the groundbreaking work that ARDA is doing. ARDA’s focus on Singapore is unusual in that many groups overlook the nation-state due to its economic prosperity.

ARDA continues to make substantial progress with its institutional development. As part of the development process, ARDA has worked on increasing membership and has also invested time in developing partnerships with other Asia-based organizations with overlapping and similar goals.

ARDA currently employs an executive director, a program officer and an accountant that manage the administrative and program responsibilities in the office. ARDA sends in its monthly receipts and Quicken reports to IRI accounting and IRI sends wires of money according to the budgets ARDA submits in advance. ARDA maintains open communication with IRI and submits regular information about programmatic activities. During the third quarter, IRI Accountant Carmelita Villanueva and IRI Assistant Program Officer Dorothy Miller spent five days in Singapore meeting with ARDA. During this time, the accountant spent considerable time reviewing financial practices and conducting trainings on manages finances and accounting practices. The program staffer discussed capacity building with ARDA and oversaw ARDA’s application for a no-cost extension through October of 2005.

**V. FUTURE ACTIVITIES**

**World Forum for Democracy in Asia Biennial Conference**

ARDA will continue to work with the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) and the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) to plan the workshops leading up to the WFDA. ARDA, TFD and CALD will also plan the WFDA to be held September 15 to 17, 2005. The

World Movement for Democracy had also indicated that it would be interested in being involved in the WFDA.

### **ARDA Book**

IRI has approved funding for the production of an ARDA book. The purpose of this book is to encourage and inspire the democracy movement in Asia. ARDA has lined up the following activists to contribute chapters for the book: Mr. Sam Rainsy (Cambodia), Mr. Martin Lee (Hong Kong), Mr. Tian Chua (Malaysia), and Dr. Soon Juan Chee (Singapore). More contributors may be invited. The book is slated for publication in 2005.

### **Asia Democracy Index**

ARDA continues to develop an index to measure democracy in Asia; results will be released at the WFDA in 2005. The ADI will be a yearly survey to measure good governance among Asian governments. The reason ARDA is undertaking this task is to produce the first democracy index for Asians - by Asians. ARDA staff, academic experts, activists and an IRI representative met in Taipei January 17-21 to develop the methodology and timeline for production of the ADI.

### **Rapid Response Missions**

ARDA is prepared to conduct Rapid Response Missions on short notice in order to address political crises that emerge. The purpose of the Mission is to draw awareness to events throughout Asia that threaten democratic stability and to let governments in Asia know that Asian organizations are watching them.

Attachment A: Recommendations from “A Report on Election Study Mission to Singapore:  
January 2005”

- 6.1 Section 14, part IV of the Singapore Constitution states that “(a) every citizen of Singapore has the right to freedom of speech and expression; (b) all citizens of Singapore have the right to assemble peaceably and without arms; and (c) all citizens of Singapore have the right to form associations.” The Election Study Mission (ESM) is clearly of the view that many of these constitutional rights have been violated by the enforcement of the Public Entertainment and Meetings Act (PEMA) and the Internal Security Act (ISA). We recommend the Singapore Government to uphold the fundamental rights of its citizens enshrined in its Constitution by abolishing all provisions in these Acts which are inconsistent with its Constitution.
- 6.2 In all elections, a line has to be drawn between legitimate competition on the one hand and unfair or illegal practices on the other. The ESM is of the view that the distribution of the New Singapore Shares to all eligible voters (see paragraph 5.2.3.2 above) and the threat not to upgrade services in constituencies where support for the opposition was strong (see paragraph 5.2.3 above) have clearly crossed the line. We recommend that such or similar practices must not be used again in future.
- 6.3 The ESM’s meeting with the Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) journalists confirmed the existence and great extent of government control over the local media in Singapore (see paragraph 5.2.4 above). Given that the SPH and MediaCorp controlled almost all electronic and print media in Singapore and that the Internet is tightly regulated by the Government, it is little wonder that the city-state has done so poorly in the 2004 Press Freedom Rankings. We recommend that urgent steps be taken to let Singapore citizens have the freedom of information via the mass media.
- 6.4 The use of defamation lawsuits by the People’s Action Party (PAP) leaders against opposition leaders is a worrying trend in Singapore. The cases that have been brought to the ESM’s attention suggest that the judiciary might have been used to obliterate opposition figures. The ESM would like a team of regional/international group legal experts to study these libel suits more closely and report its findings to internationally recognized organizations such as the International Commission of Jurists for a further review.
- 6.5 It is clearly the duty of the Elections Department (ELD) to assure voters that their votes are secret. The ESM is of the view that putting the numbers of voters’ Identity Cards on the counterfoils of ballot papers is clearly a bad practice (see paragraph 5.3.1. above). The fear that votes may be traced back to voters could easily influence some voters not to vote for opposition candidates. The ELD must do away with this practice forthwith and assure the electorate that their votes are indeed secret.
- 6.6 The ESM is not convinced by the reason given for the introduction and retention of the Group Representation Constituencies (GRC) system (see paragraph 5.3.2.1. above). Indeed, it appears that the GRC system was invented to enable the PAP to stop the opposition from winning any seat at all except the very few which the PAP is prepared to give away. (See



paragraphs 5.3.2.2. and 5.3.4.2. above) It was calculated to disadvantage the opposition. We recommend the abolition of the GRC system.

- 6.7 The redrawing of constituency boundaries without prior consultation with all political parties and the practice of only announcing the change of boundaries close to Election Day are wholly unacceptable. The ELD does not seem to realize that it is a government department and not a PAP unit. Or perhaps it is no longer possible to separate the permanent ruling party from the state. We recommend the immediate setting up of an independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission to replace the ELD. We can only hope that the proposed Commission will be allowed by the government and PAP to function independently, in which event all the other unfair practices such as short notice of new boundaries (see paragraph 5.3.3. above), and short campaign period (see paragraph 5.3.5.2. above) will be eliminated.
- 6.8 In the absence of an independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, we recommend that future new boundaries must be announced at least six months before the election to make sure that all candidates will have a fair chance to 'work the ground'.
- 6.9 Further, in the absence of an independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, we recommend a minimum notice period of at least two months between the announcement of the elections and the day of polling.
- 6.10 When all the above recommendations are implemented, there will be no place for Non-constituency Member of Parliament (NCMPs) and Nominated Member of Parliament (NMPs) whose places will be filled by democratically elected in free and fair elections. There will then be a bona fide opposition which will make the government much more accountable to Singaporeans.
- 6.11 Although the role of the President of Singapore is a ceremonial one, the acutely stringent and elitist prerequisites can only favor members and ex-members of the ruling party or its affiliates. We recommend the removal of all the unnecessary prerequisites so as to ensure that Singaporeans' choice is not limited to candidates who have been endorsed by the Singapore Government.